



From Floodway to Greenway

Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

Houston County, Georgia

Warner Robins, GA - Originally named Wellston, Warner Robins changed its name to match that of the military base that was founded near the town in the early 1940s. That Army Air Corps depot has grown over the years to become Warner Robins Air Force Base.



In 1994, Tropical Storm Alberto caused the usually dry Bay Gall Creek to overflow and flood numerous properties in midtown Warner Robins, a city of about 50,000 residents in central Georgia. Today, the formerly flooded property is the beginning of Wellston Trail, a multi-use greenway through a wooded region in what otherwise is a busy part of town known more for its strip malls and traffic jams than for tranquil parkland. This change, however, didn't happen overnight. As Walter Gray, Warner Robins city engineer puts it, "Within a week of that flood, we had people starting to repair their houses, and we had to go out and ask them to stop."

"As a participating community in the National Flood Insurance Program, Gray said, "the city was required to have property owners elevate their homes that were flooded and declared substantially damaged before any other repairs could be made. So during that first week, we were busy posting notices on all the damaged buildings we could find to let their owners know about the requirement to elevate before beginning any repairs."

At that time, Gray explained, a predecessor of FEMA current Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) program was a program known as the "1362 program." It involved Federal funding through the National Flood Insurance Act's Section 1362; this program made it possible for the city to buyout the properties of people who had flood insurance.

"The city bought about 13 houses with the 1362 money," Gray said. "But the 1362 program didn't help the people who didn't have flood insurance. So the city got back with FEMA and found out it would soon have the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) that would fund 75 percent of the cost of buying out the remaining properties. The city also applied to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for funds to cover the remaining 25 percent. With these Federal funds, we were able to buy out the remaining 25 properties, 22 of which were occupied houses."

It took approximately eight years to buy out all of the properties, Gray said, "Some of them went real quick. But we didn't finish buying the last one until about two years ago because of a disagreement regarding the price. Since then, we've owned all of the properties and have used State of Georgia green space monies to create park areas and trails on it.

"So, in addition to having green space here in the middle of town, we no longer have to come down here in boats to rescue people stranded in their houses. To me, it's the most effective thing we can invest our dollars in. I would buy out the houses in a heartbeat before I'd make major improvements to this channel. Let Mother Nature do what she does best."

The greenway that begins where flooded houses once stood is a new reality made possible by funds from FEMA's Flood Mitigation Assistance program and the foresight and persistence of Mayor Donald S. Walker, the council members, other city officials, and volunteers engaged in both the buyout program and the design and implementation of the Wellston Trail.

Activity/Project Location

Geographical Area: **Single County (County-wide)**

FEMA Region: **Region IV**

State: **Georgia**

County: **Houston County**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Public**

Hazard Type: **Flooding; Hurricane/Tropical Storm**

Activity/Project Type: **Acquisition/Buyouts**

Activity/Project Start Date: **10/1994**

Activity/Project End Date: **10/2003**

Funding Source: **Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP); National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP); Other Federal Agencies (OFA)**

Funding Recipient: **Local Government**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **Amount Not Available**

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal Disaster? **Yes**

Federal Disaster #: **1033 , 07/07/1994**

Value Tested By Disaster? **Unknown**

Repetitive Loss Property? **Unknown**

Reference URLs

Reference URL 1: **<http://www.floodsmart.gov>**

Reference URL 2: **<http://www.fema.gov/business/nfip/>**

Main Points

- The formerly flooded property is the beginning of Wellston Trail, a multi-use greenway through a wooded region in what otherwise is a busy part of town.
- The city obtained funding from HMGP, HUD, and NFIP.
- The greenway that begins where flooded houses once stood is a new reality made possible by funds from FEMA's Flood Mitigation Assistance program and the foresight and persistence of Mayor Donald S. Walker, the council members, other city officials, and volunteers engaged in both the buyout program and the design and implementation of the Wellston Trail.
- The city bought about 38 houses in the floodplain over eight years to create the popular trail and reduce future losses.